

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
MID-PACIFIC REGION  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Volta Wildlife Area Level 2 Diversification/ Incremental Level  
4 Development Pilot Project**

**FONSI No. \_\_\_\_\_**

Recommended by:

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

### **Volta Wildlife Area Level 2 Diversification/ Level 4 Development Pilot Project**

In accordance with Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the Mid-Pacific Regional Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval and associated funding for the construction of two production wells along the Volta Wasteway in the Volta Wildlife Area (VWA) is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

### **BACKGROUND**

Under the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991, as amended (Drought Act), and other authorities, Reclamation is planning to use \$40 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to fund emergency drought relief projects that can quickly and effectively mitigate the consequences of the current drought in California.

Water demands in the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valley continue to grow while developed supplies have not increased appreciably over the past several decades. Population growth and economic development in the region are resulting in both larger and firmer water demands. Changes in irrigated agricultural practices are increasing the demand for water. Additionally, there are important environmental water uses that need to be protected or expanded to sustain the Valley's rich and diverse natural habitats.

Reclamation, the San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA) and other Central Valley Project (CVP) water service contractors, as well as refuge water supply contractors south of the Delta desire that Reclamation's Refuge Water Supply Program diversify sources of Level 2 water supplies through the utilization of the groundwater resources available to the refuges and wildlife management areas. The groundwater would also provide Incremental Level 4 supplies to the refuges. .

In response to the ongoing drought and the Secretary of the Interior's responsibility to provide firm water supplies to refuges under Section 3406(d)(1, 2, and 5) of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, Reclamation proposes to provide ARRA funding for the installation of two production wells along the Volta Wasteway for a three year pilot project. The proposed well sites are located within the boundaries of the VWA. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to diversify a portion of existing Level 2 water supplies delivered to the VVWA and Grassland Resource Conservation District (GRCD) by pumping groundwater, which would result in a like amount of CVP surface water, made available for CVP agricultural contractors, while specific refuge water supply needs/obligations are met. The Proposed Action will also provide for development of additional Incremental Level 4 water available to those refuges south of the Delta. During the pilot project, a monitoring plan will be implemented which will help in

assessing the feasibility of longer term use of the wells for refuge water diversification/development.

## FINDINGS

Reclamation has prepared an EA (see attached) which analyzes the impacts of the Proposed Action. Based on the analysis in the EA, Reclamation has found that the construction of two production wells in the VWA would not result in significant impacts to the environment and does not require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This Finding of No Significant Impact is based upon the following:

**1. Surface Water Resources:** The Proposed Action would neither increase nor decrease net surface water delivered south of the Delta and, therefore, would not result in short-term or long-term adverse impacts to surface water or resources dependent on surface water. Existing infrastructure would be utilized to deliver the surface water to VWA, GRCD and San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA). Surface water resources would not be overburdened as a result of the Proposed Action.

**2. Groundwater and Geologic Resources:** Groundwater resources are believed to be of good quality and quantity below the Corcoran clay. The Proposed Action would result in a minimal increase, up to 12,000 acre-feet for three years, in groundwater production in the VWA. The wells will be monitored to ensure groundwater water use will not overburden the resource and will not result in any adverse impacts to the resource or to other water users. Water quality will also be monitored to ensure suitable quality water is being delivered to the refuges during the pilot project. The Proposed Action would not result in short-term or long-term adverse impacts to groundwater resources. Reclamation and the United States Geological Survey recently implemented a physical study referred to as the “*Evaluation of groundwater conditions and land subsidence along the Delta Mendota Canal*”. Pumping at VWA will be included in the subsidence study. If data indicates subsidence is occurring as a result of groundwater production at VWA, operation of the wells will be reevaluated to avoid any significant impacts. .

**3. Water quality:** Water quality impacts that could occur to surface water by pumping groundwater of poor quality and discharging it into the Volta Wasteway Channel (Wasteway) are minimal. This type of impact is unlikely to occur since the ratio of surface water moving through the Wasteway would be greater than the amount groundwater that is pumped into the Wasteway. Sub-Corcoran groundwater is assumed to be of suitable quality for refuge use. If necessary, surface water in the Wasteway would be used to dilute the groundwater to a suitable water quality level for further delivery to VWA and GRCD. In addition, Reclamation will implement a project monitoring plan to monitor surface and groundwater quality during the Proposed Action. If constituent levels reach certain concentrations, production will cease to avoid any significant adverse impacts to water quality.

**4. Land Use:** Under the Proposed Action, Reclamation would drill two production wells in an area that has previously been disturbed; therefore, the action would not be changing the historic land use. The Proposed Action does not conflict with any land use plans within the VWA.

**5. Air Quality:** There would be temporary impacts to air quality due to emission of air pollutants during the period of construction. Permits would be acquired for the emission of air pollutants from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, if required. It is estimated that each well would require approximately 112 hours (about 5 days) of equipment operation to construct. Due to the short duration of construction, there would not be significant adverse impacts to air quality. Additionally, the production wells are electric and would be powered by Pacific Gas and Electric which is a regulated generation facility. The use of electricity to power the test production wells would not result in significant impacts to air quality.

**6. Biological Resources:** The conveyance facilities to be used in the Proposed Action are not managed for fisheries. There would be no effect to federally listed fish species and there would be no modification of critical habitat for the species as a result of the Proposed Action. There would be no effect to San Joaquin Kit Fox because they are not present in the action area. A biological assessment was prepared to analyze the impacts of the Proposed Action on the giant garter snake (GGS). Reclamation determined that the Proposed Action “*may affect, is likely to adversely affect*” the GGS. Incidental take of ggs may result from direct impacts during construction and indirect impacts may occur due to water quality effects on GGS prey base. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service standard avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented as part of the Proposed Action to reduce or eliminate take. In addition, Reclamation will conduct biological monitoring data on GGS during the Proposed Action. Formal consultation was initiated under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Office on October 27, 2009. The Proposed Action will not be implemented until ESA compliance is completed. Completion is anticipated by Mid-April 2010. Overall, the Proposed Action will benefit biological resources in VWA and GRCD, as the groundwater will be used to manage wetland habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors and will continue to provide aquatic habitat for the GGS.

**7. Indian Trust Assets:** There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the United States in the water involved with this Proposed Action. The nearest ITA is the Chicken Ranch Rancheria approximately 62 miles northeast of the Proposed Action location.

**8. Environmental Justice:** The Proposed Action would not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. The Proposed Action would not cause dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease to economically disadvantaged or minority populations.

**9. Cultural Resources:** The Proposed Action is the type of activity that has the potential to affect historic properties. The only historic property identified within the project area was the Wasteway. The proposed well installation would result in no adverse affect to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(b). Reclamation consulted with the California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on January 22, 2010. SHPO concurred with Reclamation’s finding of No Historic Properties Affected on February 11, 2010.

**10. Climate Change:** Under the Proposed Action, the small construction element would not contribute to increased temperatures or sea level rise. The use of the Volta Wasteway is within the range of normal operations would have no impact on climate change.